

THE INFORMATION SYSTEMS STEERING COMMITTEE

In most health care organizations, a special committee known as the Information Systems Steering Committee (ISSC) is tasked with identifying projects and setting forth information systems plans and priorities. The ISSC is a function used by health care organizations to guide their information systems (IS) planning and acquisition efforts. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on establishing an ISSC.

At the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or the Executive Board, ISSCs can be formed at the enterprise level, at departmental levels, or on an ad hoc basis to oversee a specific project. At the enterprise level, the ISSC should be a standing committee, as the need for oversight of IS plans is long term. Members of the ISSC represent various parts of the organization and collectively provide the cross-functional and long-range perspective that is essential for decisions involving enterprise-wide systems. It is important to remember that an ISSC is composed primarily of business unit managers and not IS staff.

PURPOSE AND MISSION

The purpose of an ISSC is to work with the Chief Information Officer (CIO) or the head of the IS organization to establish overall IS priorities and provide general IS direction by identifying and sponsoring projects that support the organization's business plan. The primary role of the ISSC is to identify, prioritize, and oversee IS plans and projects.

The mission of the ISSC is to provide guidance to the CEO and the CIO in effectively utilizing IS resources to meet the business and operational needs of the organization. The ISSC serves to resolve conflicts in demand for IS services and resources, and to sponsor major IS projects to top management and within the user community.

CHARTER

The CEO should develop or approve the charter outlining ISSC functions and responsibilities to include:

- **Responsibility**—Define the scope of responsibility for the committee. Address the scope of the information systems to be developed or purchased and the how the ISSC will participate in developing and prioritizing IS plans. Typical responsibilities of an ISSC include:
 - Establish IS user groups or focus groups for specific IS activities and issues
 - Gather and synthesize requirements from business units and IS user groups
 - Resolve and clarify business priorities relative to IS requirements
 - Evaluate alternative strategies for satisfying business information needs
 - Recommend priorities for major IS projects and initiatives

- Review and advise on IS strategic plans and system implementation plans
- Advise and assist the CIO in resolving conflicting priorities and requests for IS services
- **Authority and Reporting Relationships**—Describe to whom the committee reports and where the committee fits within the organizational structure. Usually the ISSC reports directly to the CEO or his/her appointee, and has the authority to establish or recommend priorities for major IS projects.
- **Objectives**—Define the planning horizon for the committee (typically 1-3 years) and the objectives that the committee should address in this timeframe. Objectives are usually related to identifying IS needs, setting priorities, and approving plans for major IS projects.
- **Membership**—Identify the committee members and appoint a chairperson.
- **Administration**—Define the administrative environment and duties of the committee. These should include:
 - Allocate an ISSC budget
 - Require periodic reports of accomplishments, plans and issues
 - Ensure that the members are educated about information systems and the role they play in the organization
 - Require that the ISSC keep and distribute its minutes

MEMBERSHIP

The ISSC is a senior-level committee formed by the health care network CEO. The ISSC is composed primarily of senior managers; however, the CEO should not be an ISSC member. The CEO should monitor the ISSC's activities, respond to its recommendations, and encourage its members to complete their assigned duties. The CEO must remain objective while retaining the ability to engage in a complete review of the ISSC's actions and recommendations. The CIO or MIS Director should serve on the committee in an advisory role.

The CEO should appoint the chair of the ISSC. The chair is usually the equivalent of the network's chief operating officer or senior associate administrator. It may be desirable to have the committee co-chaired by two individuals, giving equal voice to the organization's fiscal and clinical functions. The ISSC chair should not be the CIO or the MIS Director, since the ISSC's recommendations must be perceived as flowing from the business needs of the organization, rather than IS priorities. Thus, the ISSC is not a technology committee; rather it is formed to guide the use of information technology to help solve the network's problems and meet its objectives. The CIO or MIS Director should regularly advise the ISSC on the status of IS projects and plans, and bring IS-related issues before the ISSC for guidance and management decision recommendations.

Experience of hospitals and other health care delivery systems has shown that the following composition usually results in a strong and effective ISSC:

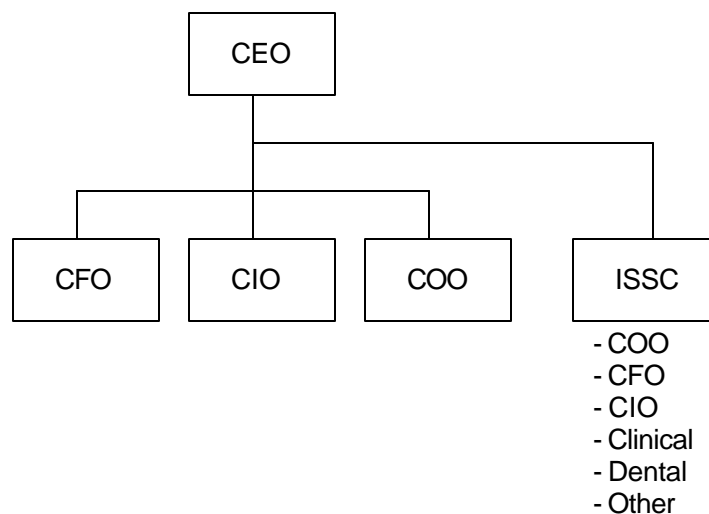
- Two or three senior management members
- One or two middle management members
- At least one representative from the medical staff
- CIO or MIS Director

The senior management representatives are almost always the Chief Financial Officer, the equivalent of the director of nursing, and the administrator responsible for clinical departments (if this is not the head of nursing). It is advisable to appoint the organization's medical director and dental director to the committee to ensure input from the medical and dental staff.

In order to ensure that all major functional areas within the organization are represented, weigh the role of information systems in various departments, the overall managerial abilities of the people under consideration, and their level of interest in serving. Among those that should be considered are the directors of:

- Medical Records
- Business Office
- Ancillary Services
- Human Resources

Additional permanent or temporary members may be appointed as necessary to bring needed skills and perspectives to the committee. Following is a typical organization structure for an ISSC in a large health care network:



CONDUCTING BUSINESS

The ISSC should meet regularly on a monthly or at least quarterly basis. Most of the committee's time will be spent on identifying new IS projects and assigning or adjusting priorities of projects. The projects, once identified, must be assigned priorities for development or implementation. In identifying and prioritizing projects, the following decision factors should be considered:

- Alignment of IS plans with strategic organizational goals and business plans
- Cost/benefit comparisons of projects competing for IS resources
- Laws, regulations and market factors driving changes in business practices
- Resource requirements and availability
- Project implementation and organizational issues

In establishing project priorities, it is useful to define categories of priority. Within each category, projects can then be ranked according to their relative priority. A common such set of categories includes:

- **Mandatory:** Projects required by law or regulation
- **High:** Projects with significant known and tangible benefits
- **Normal:** Projects with recognized but intangible benefits
- **Low:** System enhancements and improvement projects with low or unknown benefits

The CIO should bring any major conflicts for IS resources to the attention of the ISSC and solicit the committee's assistance in resolving the conflicts. The ISSC should also regularly review the status of projects in progress with the CIO and recommend adjustments to priorities and resource allocations to help bring a delayed project back on schedule.